

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, introduced by Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK), Barack Obama (D-IL), Thomas Carper (D-DE) and John McCain (R-AZ), creates an online public database that itemizes federal funding.

The bill ensures that the taxpayers will now know how their money is being spent. Every citizen in this country, after all, should have the right to know what organizations and activities are being funded with their hard-earned tax dollars.

The federal government awards roughly \$300 billion in grants annually to 30,000 different organizations across the United States, according to the General Services Administration.

This bill would require the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to establish and maintain a single public website that lists all entities receiving federal funds, including the name of each entity receiving federal funds, the amount of federal funds the entity has received annually by program, and the location of the entity.

This would be an important tool to make federal funding more accountable and transparent. It would also help to reduce fraud, abuse and misallocation of federal funds by requiring greater accounting of federal expenditures. According to OMB, federal agencies reported \$37.3 billion in improper payments for fiscal year 2005 alone. Better tracking of federal funds would ensure that agencies and taxpayers know where resources are being spent and likely reduce the number of improper payments by federal agencies.

Over the past year, the Senate Federal Financial Management Subcommittee has uncovered more than \$425 billion in fraud, abuse and wasteful spending, ranging from expensive leasing schemes to corporate welfare to bloated bureaucracy. This database would ensure that such spending is better tracked and the public can hold policy makers and government agencies accountable for questionable spending decisions.

The website required by this bill would not be difficult to develop. In fact, one such site already exists for some federal funds provided by agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services. The CRISP (Computer Retrieval of Information on Scientific Projects) is a searchable database of federally funded biomedical research projects conducted at universities, hospitals, and other research institutions. The database, maintained by the Office of Extramural Research at the National Institutes of Health, includes projects funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ), and Office of Assistant Secretary of Health (OASH). The CRISP database contains current and historical awards dating from 1972 to the present.

This type of information should be available for all federal contracts, grants, loans and assistance.

It often takes agencies months to verify or to determine an organization's funding when requested by Congress. The public, whose taxes finance these groups and programs, watch dog organizations and the media can file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests which take even longer to receive responses and often go ignored. This bill would require that all federal assistance be posted within 30 days of such funding being awarded to an organization.

If enacted, this legislation will ensure true accountability and transparency in how the government spends our money which will hopefully lead to more fiscal responsibility by the federal government.

Washington Examiner

May 31, 2006

[http://www.examiner.com/a-123156~Editorial\\_Shine\\_more\\_light\\_on\\_federal\\_spending.html](http://www.examiner.com/a-123156~Editorial_Shine_more_light_on_federal_spending.html)

## Editorial: Shine more light on federal spending

**WASHINGTON** - Abraham Lincoln said, "Let the people know the facts and all will be safe," so the Great Emancipator would certainly cheer an unlikely group of United States senators who have recently joined forces to push a potentially landmark measure. That measure is designed to put every American citizen within a few mouse clicks of knowing the facts needed to track federal spending as never before.

This measure should receive top-priority attention in Congress and be signed by President Bush at the earliest possible opportunity. The proposal is known as the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (S. 2590). Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., is the original architect of the proposal, which was quickly co-sponsored by Sens. Barack Obama, D-Ill., Tom Carper, D-Del., and John McCain, R-Ariz.

Their bill requires the U.S. Office of Management and Budget to establish a publicly available, searchable and downloadable database of all federal contracts and grants. Access to the federal spending database would be free and would include comprehensive information about federal contracts; block, formula and project grants; cooperative agreements; direct, guaranteed and insured loans; direct payments; insurance and indirect financial assistance. No information about credit-card transactions or minor purchases would be on the site.

The Coburn-Obama-Carper-McCain measure stipulates that within 30 days of awarding federal tax dollars, the government would have to post the name of the entity receiving the funds (excluding individuals receiving federal assistance), the amount of funds received by the entity in each of the past 10 years, detailed information about each of the transactions during the previous decade, the location of the entity, where the goods or services purchased with the federal dollars will be performed or purchased, and a unique identifier such as the Dun & Bradstreet number commonly used by the private sector.

Uncle Sam spends more than \$250 billion annually on contracts to buy everything from Aspirin to zirconium needed for its daily operations. Billions more tax dollars flow from Washington to state and local governments, pension payments and interest payments to holders of the bonds used to finance the government's chronic deficits.

In the meantime, a liberal advocacy group isn't waiting on Congress and the president. OMB Watch expects to have its own Federal Contracts and Grants Database up on its Web site later this year, thanks to a grant by the Sunlight Foundation. OMB Watch is doing the hard and expensive work of linking the U.S. Census Bureau's Federal Assistance Awards Data System and the General Services Administration's Federal Procurement Data System. When it's completed, the OMB Watch database will mark a major advance in the ability of the public to hold the federal government accountable for how it spends our tax dollars.

But the Coburn-Obama-Carper-McCain measure would be even better, and if Congress and the president act now, odds are good that OMB could have the more comprehensive spending database available to the public in two years. There are no legitimate reasons to delay.

S. 2590, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, introduced by Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK), Barack Obama (D-IL), Thomas Carper (D-DE) and John McCain (R-AZ), creates an online public database that itemizes federal funding.

This bill would require the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to establish and maintain a single public website that lists all entities receiving federal funds, including the name of each entity receiving federal funds, the amount of federal funds the entity has received annually by program, the location of the entity, and the purpose of the funding.

The federal government awards roughly \$300 billion in grants annually to 30,000 different organizations across the United States, according to the General Services Administration.

The creation of this website would be relatively inexpensive and holds the potential to save the taxpayers money.

A public database of these recipients would be an important tool to make federal funding more accountable and transparent and as a result perhaps make policy makers and bureaucrats more fiscally responsible. It would also help to reduce fraud, abuse and misallocation of federal funds by requiring greater accounting of federal expenditures.

The bill has been endorsed by over 20 organizations from across the political and ideological spectrum—from Citizens Against Government Waste to OMB Watch, from the Family Research Council to the Log Cabin Republicans.

This bill, which has been referred to the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, should be included as part of any budget reform proposal considered by the Senate this year.